



### **DNRC/Montana Historical Society Oral History Program**

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1. Interviewees: Diana Graveley and her daughter Charmon Graveley Hansen
2. Interviewer: Bradley Hansen
3. Date of Interview: November 20, 2013
4. Location: Home of Diana Graveley, Helena, Montana, United States.

#### **Introduction**

This interview highlights Diana Graveley's experiences ranching near Townsend, Montana. Her memories/experiences help provide a much clearer understanding of the important role women have played in Montana's agricultural and ranching history.

#### **Interview**

Brad: Today is November 20, 2013 at 5:15pm and I am in the home of Diana Graveley along with her daughter Charmon Graveley Hansen. We are going to talk about some of Diana's experiences ranching in Montana. With that I'll ask you to spell your name for the record.

Diana: Do you want the full name?

Brad: Yes

Diana: Diana Graveley

Brad: OK, we're good to go. We can follow the outline if you'd like. Would you like to do that?

Diana: Yes. I do know that my parents were from the Billings, Montana area. How they met specifically, I don't know. I don't think my mother ever said for sure, but they were farmers and ranchers, and my grandparents farmed and ranched down there as well. My grandfather on my dad's side, that was the Burkart side, was supposed to have been AWOL from the Russian Army. Because of everything going on in Russia and Germany at the time, they came over here and immigrated down to Nebraska. When the Huntley project in Yellowstone County opened up

they moved out there and homesteaded. That's how they raised their family. They were supposed to have had eleven children, but only five of them here.

Brad: Where were the other children?

Diana: They were supposed to have been left in Germany, and they were supposed to have been dead. I don't know if they ever checked for sure. Not having the technology to question, and because of Hitler and all, made it hard to say. They became farmers and ranchers because it was something they were left to do.

Brad: It was something they could do.

Diana: I think they maybe had farmed in those areas because of some of the stories. My folks were farming and ranching and were able to lease a place down in the Huntley area from his uncle.

Brad: Where is Huntley?

Diana: Huntley is in Yellowstone, down below Billings.

Brad: Oh, Ok.

Diana: It is that valley down from Billings on out towards Miles City. They homesteaded a lot of that.

Brad: Were your mom and dad born here in the United States or did they emigrate from Europe?

Diana: No, my dad was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, and my mom was born here in Billings.

Brad: Was it their parents who emigrated from Europe?

Diana: Yes. My mother's dad was a sheep shearer and came from the Missouri area. That's where he picked up his wife. She was supposed to have had only a third grade education. She was still a pretty slick woman. My mother practically starved to death when she was young. They didn't have a lot. She did a lot of the farming and helping on the farm. Her father was pretty abusive and so on. They would get together and talk about that. I didn't ever have to worry about eating because she went and got the meat one way or another, even if we had to go fishing or hunting. They were farming and ranching in that area when I was born in Billings. They moved up here when I was three years old. I have an older sister that is eight years older. I ended up marrying the neighbor boy who lived four miles away.

Diana: How we met.

Brad: Yes.

Diana: Square Dancing. We did square dancing through the seventh and eighth grade level up through high school.

Brad: Was square dancing something that happened frequently in the community?

Diana: It was something that took off at that time, in the early 1950s through that era. A lot of people did square dance. It was a big thing for a while.

Brad: I've heard that. It was very popular and everyone in the community would come in from their farms and ranches and get together and dance.

Diana: We had a little schoolhouse, called the Johnson Schoolhouse. I've known different women over the years, neighborhood women and so on, and my mother in-law included, that taught school there. It's a room about the size of this kitchen without the counter. We used to get a heck of a lot of people in there square dancing. It had a big old stove heating the room too.

Brad: I bet it was plenty warm.

Diana: I walked into it later and said, "Where in the world did we dance?"

Diana: That was my basic home. I lived on a farm and ranch and we had cattle and hay and grain. We fought with the beavers for the water in the gulch to get into our reservoir. Over the years I learned to do about anything that the men were doing. I liked to go out and work in the garage and shop. Had it been another 15-20 years, I'd probably become a mechanic.

Charmon: She was a mechanic.

Diana: I did later on.

Brad: Did you feel when you were younger that there were strict gender roles between men and women? Or, like you said, was it accepted that if a woman was good at fixing something, like a mechanic, could she go out and do that? Or was it frowned upon?

Diana: I think most everybody wanted to keep the genders separate. But with me nobody ever said no you're not supposed to do it. I wore bib overalls and went out and scraped the old hog after they butchered it. I remember a friend who lived here in Helena said "First time I ever seen you, you were scrapping the old hog's tail and wiping it on your bib overalls (laughter)."

Brad: It sounds like you were a very independent spirit. Would you agree?

Charmon: I would agree. I think a lot of that also comes from the fact that she came from a family that had no boys. It was just her and her sister on the farm. So who was going to do the work?

Brad: That's a good point.

Diana: One of the fellas who helped my dad harvest by driving truck while we were in school had boys. They had boys and they told us “How do you get them girls to work all weekend?” All the boys want to do is play basketball.

Brad: Showing up the boys?

Diana: They were saying they couldn't get their boys to work.

Charmon: Do you think that this was because you were boarded out to school? My mom was boarded out to school here in Helena. They left the home on Sunday and would get picked up on Friday, weather permitting.

Brad: Interesting. So you lived in Helena.

Charmon: The farm was on the other side of Canyon Ferry Lake.

Brad: Oh, so would the busses pick you up?

Diana: No, my folks brought me in and we boarded in town.

Brad: Who did you stay with?

Diana: When I was younger my mother stayed two or three years. After that I stayed with families. I was in the Deaconess School from the second grade through the sixth, I think. Then I went to Central School, seventh grade into high school. I looked forward to weekends. I was not that studious a person (laughter). I would daydream about riding horses.

Brad: That makes sense. You wanted to get back to the ranch.

Diana: I rode horses from the time I was three years old.

Brad: Wow.

Diana: I had a nice old gentle horse and he took me a good many miles. Wherever my mom and sister went, I went. We would do lots of riding in order to take care of the cattle in the summer range and on Forest Service land.

Brad: Was your parent's land on the other side of Canyon Ferry?

Diana: Yes, on the east side of Canyon Ferry.

Brad: How much land did they have out there?

Diana: They had a little over 4,000 acres. It may have been a little more than that. Canyon Ferry took some property. The Graveley Ranch, in which we ended up living most of our life, ended

up losing some ground as well to the lake. I remember all that history when they used to argue about that. Some people thought it was a grand idea. And others did not.

Brad: For people who lost their land it probably wasn't a grand idea.

Diana: It wasn't necessarily losing it all, but it was very good ground. It took some really good ground that was tax based out of Broadwater County. Then they let all the cabins be in Lewis and Clark County. Figure that one out. They didn't give the tax base back to Broadwater. It was supposed to have a longer canal than it did. If it had, I don't know what it would have done. Most of the canals are restricted on acreage. In Montana this doesn't work. Back East it might work because they get a lot more moisture.

Brad: Yes, most of the moisture here falls as snow, not necessarily rain.

Diana: Besides, we only receive on average 9-11 inches a year.

Brad: That's not much.

Diana: No not when you think about what it is in other areas. That is something that in the 1970s was average. Now I would say it is maybe less.

Brad: It has seemed to be getting drier.

Diana: Yes.

Diana: I met my husband and we were square dancing. We both like it. We both had the same interests. We liked to do the same things.

Brad: What's his name?

Diana: Gary.

Diana: He died in 2004. You said to describe my upbringing. We got married right out of high school in December 1958. My husband really planned on going to veterinarian school, and we were living in Bozeman. He was going to work for his mother part of the time. We ended up getting a phone call from his mother one day in the winter, there was a storm and the cows hadn't been fed for a few days. Gary went home to feed the cows and after that he called me up and said we are moving back. He was done with school. His brother was on the ranch too, working for wages. I want to say we got \$200 a month.

Charmon: What kind of housing did you have?

Diana: We had to furnish our own housing.

Brad: What did that entail?

Diana: We moved into an old neighbor's home. The wind blew that fall, and blew the match out that I was using to light the heater. I called Gary and said "You got to come get me I'm freezing (laughter)!" It was that bad. The chinking in the logs was terrible. He came and picked me up and took me over to the ranch. We stayed there about a week and then went to town and rented a house for \$75 a month in Townsend.

Brad: Did you have any children at this time?

Diana: No. I'd had one that we lost in August.

Diana: It was in 1971 that Don Williams, the neighbor just down the road, called. He came up and wanted to sell the place to us. I suppose they got to talking about him doing something else because he had a scare with his health. He needed to get out of the stress of this.

Brad: Who was this again?

Diana: Don Williams. He owned some property that was not too far from the Graveley Ranch.

Brad: So this is the property that you mentioned you leased for a while?

Diana: Yes. We leased it while we were living there, ten years. Ten years and five kids later I moved back and went to the ranch, but that was the first place we bought. It was a little over 3,000 acres, I remember.

Brad: What did you do on the ranch? Was it a cattle ranch?

Diana: We had some cattle, we had hay. It was very good ground as far as hay ground. And there was some dry-land farming on it.

Brad: Ok.

Diana: Of course my husband did that, and we were able to sell the hay. First we leased the cattle from Williams. We leased the cattle and the equipment from him for five years. We did grow enough to make a deal to buy the ranch. Then we went ahead and bought it. We retained 1,000 acres and put in with the Graveley Ranch. It was some acreage that was really fit. The people who were interested in that property were kind of speculating on some gold.

Brad: That brings us to this next question. Describe the events leading up to the purchase of the Graveley Ranch in 1972. What happened in 1972 when you decided to buy the Graveley Ranch?

Diana: We had made a deal to sell our property at that point. Of course my husband had always wanted to get to the home place eventually if he could. I think all of them had a dream of that. And the one brother and his mom and my mother in law both hit a disagreement time. It was prior to us selling this property. At that time she asked Gary if he would help her run the property. With hired help he would do the two places, between her and us.

Brad: Sounds like a lot of work.

Diana: They would swap back and forth. They would do one place and come and do the other place. So then in the interim of 1971, we got a deal on selling the property. It kind of fell through because a couple of guys were going back to Idaho in an airplane and it crashed. There was a third party in with them so we were in limbo for a while. He had the option to go ahead and follow through with the earnest money, sale of the property. It never really materialized. In between times we made a deal with my mother in law to get in with her place.

Brad: Wheelin' and dealin' (laughter).

Diana: My husband was a go getter. That is part of this. He would just figure and figure and figure. He said, "We have this thousand acres we retained, can we go into the ranch with you?" We bought a half share or a half partnership with his mom. So in 1972 we were ready to move up there. She had built a new house. She met a fella who was widowed and they got close. We were talking about doing something with the old house and so they finally said "Well you know, maybe you should just decide to come in this house." She said, "I'm moving to the lake with Mack."

Brad: So did you move into that house?

Diana: Yes. We jacked it up because it wasn't big enough for a big family. We put a full basement under it.

Charmon: It was a three bedroom home on just a crawlspace, and they literally jacked it up.

Diana: And we lived in it while it was jacked up.

Brad: How did that work?

Diana: House movers came and put jacks under it.

Charmon: There were no stairs, so we had to put a ladder into the house every evening because it was at a different height.

Diana: When the wind blew you could lie in bed and rock a little (laughter). They would extend the pipes every night.

Brad: What an adventure.

Diana: Especially when she (Charmon) and her sister weren't very old. Her sister was about two or three.

Brad: Charmon, do you remember much about the house?

Charmon: Not a lot. I remember mostly because of seeing pictures and hearing stories.

Diana: That summer we moved up there to do the work. At that time we bought a trailer house and we lived in that and camped out. That is where we were supposed to live until the big house was remodeled. With the price, though, you might as well build a new one. That's when she said we should do something with this house. When she moved she was still partners for another five years or so. We had enough equity and so on we could go ahead and buy it from her. Of course, it takes time to do that, especially when you are between family members. It took a year or two to get things all settled.

Brad: That brings us to our next question. What was ranch life like? Can you describe your daily chores, the types of animals on the ranch, and what the landscape was like?

Charmon: We were talking about it just the other day. I know mom's cousin lives here in town and I always figured she was a stay at home mom. My mom was not a stay at home mom. She was on the ranch with us, but was definitely not a stay at home mom. She worked right along with my dad. As soon as she could leave us kids at home by ourselves she did. She would be out there all day long with him and still had to come home and cook and clean and do laundry while dad and the guys got to sit and relax.

Diana: She remembers more of this because of her age. Your memory is keener. But I didn't do that much outside work until we moved to the ranch. I was in the transition. I did some riding when she was a baby and I remember having to leave her with my mother in law. I'd have to go take care of something my husband wanted taking care of.

Brad: I think this is a really important part of the history of ranching. There are lots of histories of the heroic efforts of men, but there are also the efforts of women that need to be told. You mentioned that not only were you out there on the horse helping out with whatever needed to be done, you come home and took care of the children and cooked the meals. That was really the glue that held it all together in a lot of ways.

Diana: As for chores, we had to be like all the others. From the time we were first married we had to be like the others. You had to have a milk cow. You had to have a garden. So we bought a couple of milk cows. We had a few cows that I had from my home ranch. My husband went and bought some. We were able to buy a bunch of cows.

Brad: Did you make your own butter and cheese?

Diana: I didn't make cheese, but I did make butter and sold cream in town. A lot of times the cream paid for our butter and our ice cream; anything that the creamery handled. I'd deliver the cream and at the end of the month pick up what I needed. At the end of the month I'd get a check besides. A lot of times it would help with the groceries.

Diana: We had a pretty good size garden. The family that had been there prior to us worked that one piece of property right there by the house. They had a big garden, so we just made a big garden. My goodness we had to have it big. I can remember picking three and four five gallon

buckets of beans. Then I wondered what to do with these, so I learned to can just like my mother did. I canned everything that I could.

Brad: I know how much work canning is because every year I can peaches. That is one of the easier ones.

Charmon: We canned just about everything that could be canned or frozen?

Brad: How did you can things then? What was the process? I think people might be interested to know how you can beans.

Diana: Well after you pick them you clean them and put them in jars with hot water and salt. Then they are processed in a pressure cooker for so many minutes at a certain temperature.

Brad: That kills the bacteria.

Diana: And seals the jar.

Brad: How long will a can of beans last?

Diana: As long as that seal is not broken it is as good as it is every going to be. In those days they didn't have refrigeration. Anything you heat up, you heat for ten minutes and that kills all the bacteria. Some of these newer bugs might be better than what we had back then, I don't know. I was concerned one time about how my grandmother treated some chicken. She left it just sitting on the stove in room temperature. I said to my mother "How can she do that?" She said "Oh as long as its heated up for ten minutes it's Ok."

Brad: I don't know if I'd eat that chicken.

Charmon: I don't know either.

Brad: What do you remember about the animals?

Diana: Like I started to tell you, we had milk cows. I had milked a cow when I was younger when I was at home. We each had a milk cow, my sister and myself. When we were home we were expected to do that, and the chicken chores. When I got married the first thing I did was let my husband know I could milk the cows. When the babies were sleeping I would run out and get the cows in. He used to say "I used to love to watch you run that quarter mile and get those cows in. If they weren't in the barn you would run out there and get them." At one point I had four or five of them. I quit milking partly because the cream had to be shipped up the road by train. We turned them into nurse cows and we bought calves. I'd raise about twenty calves on the cows. I had half a dozen cows. I had it all figured out. Those calves would come in and suck the ones they were supposed to and out they would go. Then they would get on the grain. Then I'd get a new set of calves. That's how I'd get extra money. We had the range cows and at the same time I had bum lambs. I got quite a herd of lambs until someone decided they wanted to buy them from me.

Brad: You mentioned you raised pigs as well.

Diana: Yes. My husband decided we could make money raising some pigs. We had quite a process. We built a confinement barn that handled the sows. I can't remember how many, but there were sixteen crates in one end, and I think sixteen pens in the backside. They were born in this end and went out the other end finished pigs. He would bring a truckload into Montana Meats. That was another thing. Montana Meats finally changed hands and that market went down to where you had to ship them out farther, and that killed us. At the same time grain went up all of the sudden and pork went down. You couldn't get rid of them fast enough. But they kept us going there for a good portion of those ten years. We never did get back into pigs that much. We had three or four or five of them for butchering.

Brad: Charmon, do you remember much about that?

Charmon: Not about the pigs, no. That was before me, or I was too young. I know the stories that she tells. I don't know which one of us she was pregnant with, but the boar took her for a ride (laughter).

Diana: Well it was just a big pig (laughter). He was big enough.

Charmon: My dad always said she bounced on her belly on the top of that pig. She was eight months pregnant.

Diana: He would say, "Funny thing was, when she fell off the pig she kept bouncing (laughter)." He wanted to laugh really bad at the time, but he knew he would have been killed (laughter).

Brad: Maybe now we can talk about the 1980s. You mentioned when I talked with you earlier that the 1980s were a really tough time on the ranch because of the fluctuation of interest rates. Talk to us a little about that. How did you and your husband deal with those challenges?

Diana: My mother was alone on my home place and my sister and her husband bought that place. They had cattle and a farm. We had already put wheel lines on our place. My husband had expanded some of the acreage on what could be irrigated. We had more acres under sprinkler. Then about that time my brother in law got up there and he wanted to put water on these acres, and we had to come farm it. So we went down there on a percentage basis. We did both farms and ranches. When the two daughters were big enough that they could be in the field with us, they ran swathers. The youngest one ran a swather with me and she ran a bailer with the guys. We were going through 1,500 acres of hay and 1,500 acres of grain. That was quite a job, plus the 400 acres of dry land crop. That harvested every other year. Every other year it was worked.

Brad: When did you have any free time?

Charmon: July 4<sup>th</sup> (laughter).

Diana: So much of the time I would hope it would rain. When the girls got to be working with us we did make it a point to take some trips with them. We were able to decide when we were done, we were out of there. We had hired help to take over too. At one point we were at twenty-something wheel lines. We were each changing three or four of them. I was changing a set of them. We'd all buzz out on motorcycles and change our lines. Then we would go do other things. Once haying season started one person would have to take on the extra water. The rest of us would hit the other equipment.

Brad: How did you coordinate that with the family? How did you decide who did what?

Charmon: I don't know how that decision was ever made.

Diana: I don't know. The oldest one I guess, he started bailing when he was nine years old.

Charmon: I was eleven, not full time bailing, but I was eleven years old the first time. Then I was pretty much full time all summer when I was thirteen.

Brad: Did you start driving at age five?

Diana: Oh yea. The youngest boy ended up getting the measles. By the time the rest of them all came down with it he was fine. He went to school. We left the pickup at the bus stop for him loaded with hay. He would jump down, push the clutch in, and get it started. Of course it was in four-low and he would turn the key and get it started and jump up and drive it on home. My mother in law said one day when he was younger that that he must have been about five. She said, "I just seen the big truck coming in here with grain but I couldn't see a driver (laughter)." He is still driving to this day. The oldest one and the third boy are still driving 18-wheelers.

Charmon: I always say that I was designated to bailing hay because I couldn't drive a straight line (laughter). So I couldn't swath it. My mom and my sister swathed it, got it cut. When you are the person bailing and you don't have a straight line to follow it is not fun (laughter).

Diana: We concentrated on keeping it as straight as you could because each one down the line it is easier to do once the first person does their job good.

Brad: I've heard that nowadays they have GPS systems that help guide the tractors.

Diana: Yea, some of them don't even have to have anybody in them.

Brad: My uncle works with my grandpa. They have some land in Utah that they grow hay on. He always jokes around that his GPS is Natural Light (laughter). His rows look like "S's."

Diana: With the old time grade ditches you had to be careful. But once you got the wheel line everything could be straight. I would tell the kids I was allergic to moving pipe. They had some hand lines they changed. The girls got in on some of that.

Brad: Was that the three inch pipe?

Charmon: Yes. We would have to do that, us girls.

Diana: The mosquitos would pack them away. We had 80 acres that was on the hand line for a while.

Charmon: Us girls would do it as long as the crop wasn't too tall. As soon as it got too tall we were too short and our legs wouldn't go through it.

Diana: The two oldest boys pretty much would be there and we had a young fella that worked for us. He had been over in Boulder when they had the school for challenged children. He was teachable. His parents had just put him in there because they couldn't handle him during the teenage years.

Brad: Did you generally have a lot of hired help?

Charmon: Five kids (laughter).

Diana: We had five kids.

Brad: You don't have to pay them (laughter).

Diana: We had one young man that was the same age as our kids that came up from Arizona. He worked the summers for three or four years and then he stayed on for another year. He learned to be good. We didn't really have to pay him the first years. Room and board was enough. Then we did get to paying him. Our kids sort of got paid. They got a steer a year and they had 4H in between.

Charmon: When mom was done working in the field, doing the laundry and cooking, us kids were teaching our steers how to lead so that we could take them to the 4H fair and sell them. That was our money.

Brad: Could a good steer bring a healthy profit?

Charmon: I remember my top price was probably \$1,500. We bought a lot of our own clothes by that time. We would pay for a lot of things that we wanted.

Diana: Maybe other parents would have to buy.

Charmon: I remember one of my steers paid for my braces.

Brad: Wow.

Charmon: That was the work that we did. One of my early memories of mom was her running a swather without a cab. I remember her getting her hat made all up with the netting. It would be

hotter than hades outside and she would have long sleeves on, long pants on, and she'd go swathing. Because of all the bugs and mosquitos.

Diana: You are sitting there in no cab. We had em' all open. At one point my husband came in and he just couldn't make himself go back out. It was so cold on that tractor with no cab. He said, "If we ever get a chance to buy any more new equipment it's gonna have cabs on it." For a long time after that everything had cabs on it. You can imagine how mad those bugs were when the swather had hit them. Then they'd hit you. They are stinging.

Charmon: I think that they just added equipment every time a kid was old enough to drive.

Diana: You think (laughter)! I think in the description of how we handled the economy, inflation was driving us. It was helping us pay for equipment. At one point, we wondered if this would really pay. Inflation kind of helps you out with tax deductions for your equipment, even though you are borrowing. The ranch had to borrow to finance the irrigation and you are always waiting for the next year. The next year will have to be better. We'll get them paid down a little more. But you never quite seem to get it paid. Next year you are hoping. Each year is another hope. Over the years interest would go up. At one point we were paying over a hundred thousand dollars in interest alone. Now I can't get any interest on my money. It's really a dig in my side when I can't even go invest in anything and get even part of that back. Through the 1980s everything was challenging. Like the housing has been recently. The farmers and ranchers had all this money out, but there was no equity there. They started thinking, "no value there."

Brad: A bubble?

Diana: Yes. Of course we were very fortunate that we knew somebody who was on the board, and my husband was able to talk to him and he said "Look out." We were one of the biggest borrowers. What happened is they merged. We had a loan with PCA and the ranch was financed through Federal Land Bank. Someway they merged together. All of the sudden we had this great big conglomerate of money that was owed just to that. So they call you in and say, "Well we think we outta have this paid down." My husband said, "What do you think we should do?" They said, "Well what's the value on your cattle? What's the value on the equipment?" Why then you start figuring it out. Well that doesn't pay too much off. So then he said, "What do I do next?" The man said, "You can sell the property if you can." My husband said, "Yea good luck with that."

Charmon: It was sort of like you guys were too big to let fail.

Diana: Well yes.

Charmon: The bank couldn't afford to let you fail.

Diana: They figured if they could get us to fold they would have a lot more start crumbling quick. It was that year that we bought the yearlings and fed em' out. My husband was always doing something on a big scale.

Brad: Sounds like he was quite the entrepreneur.

Diana: He always had an operation or something happening.

Charmon: We had a lot of hay that year and hay wasn't selling for very much. It was better to buy 1,000 head of yearlings and feed our hay to them and then sell the yearlings in the spring then to try and sell the hay. So we did this, 1,000 head of yearlings. The second boy, my brother Bill was in college, my brother Kurt, myself, and my sister were still home but the oldest was off in Denver. He was in the oil fields. So it was basically the three of us, mom, and dad. Dad ended up getting into a car wreck and broke his back. So now we had three kids in school. We did have a husband and wife, a hired man. A thousand head of yearlings along with the 250 cows and calves.

Diana: Part of those were ours.

Brad: In other words, you were creative and worked really hard.

Diana: At that point the banks hadn't merged the loan. The one guy was talking. In fact they had a satellite office there in Townsend. At one point he was adamant that we ought to borrow more money and buy more cattle. My husband said, "No I don't have the water." He said, "I've got to pump the water or take them to the creek on part of them anyway." So by the time we got done with that I was going in the hole when I figured out the hay prices. I threw the sheet of paper in the corner and that was the last time I looked at it (laughter).

Brad: Was that when you decided it was time to sell?

Diana: Well, no. That had been prior. That had been before this changeover. If you sell your equipment and your cattle, that's the only way to make a living. So we stubbornly sat there and said no we'll keep right on going. And guess what, we had some really good creditors. We had not screwed them in any way. And they sat on money for us. Hid it for us. They knew it was there, but they couldn't get it. We couldn't get it. We could get everybody to work with us.

Charmon: In a small community like Townsend your creditors would work with you too. The parts store, the grocery store. That's back when you charged groceries.

Diana: We had three years of income that was hanging there in the bank. It was just waiting there, hands on it. That's when they started negotiating.

Brad: So that was in the 1980s. Now who owns the property?

Diana: About 1987 or 1988 we were able to get negotiated with the bank and get a negotiation buy down, buy out. It was forgiveness for part of the loan, and then we did payments on it from then on and got that settled. Once we had that settled we went back. Of course the price of diesel goes up, everything goes up. The reason the farming and ranching did not go on in the family, it was at a hundred years. My husband had broken his back in 1983. I want to say 1981. He broke his back. Kurt hit the dam, and you (Charmon) had appendicitis. The hired man

tipped the pickup over feeding cows. We had three vehicles that had to be repaired and three people that had to be repaired all in that time (laughter). Gordon cut his toes off. That's what it was.

Charmon: My oldest brother was out in the oil fields.

Diana: So three people were in the hospital and three vehicles were in the shop. My husband had hurt his back. He was able to get back to where he could ride in the ten years or so. He probably rode and did quite a bit of the work that next ten years, but then in 1993 is when he had surgery on his back. It was drastic surgery. From then on he was not able to work a full day.

Charmon: Not to mention in 1987 the youngest one, my sister graduated from high school and went off to college. I got married and moved to Texas. Kurt, the middle one, got married and stayed on the farm. The oldest brother was in the oil fields. The second brother had graduated from college in Mechanized Ag, but got in job in Billings and has lived in Billings ever since.

Brad: So everyone grew up, things happened and changed.

Charmon: So now to operate the farm you actually have to pay someone. Now you have that added expense. My brother who was still there was getting a wage, whereas before it was room and board.

Diana: He was raising a family, one after another. Then he hurt his back and he was laid up so the oldest boy came back and he farmed with us while he was married. But then we had a full time hired man for a few years before. He was handling things pretty darn good and we were up to 400 head of cattle and then we hit another drought. We had nowhere to expand. There was no other property close. You could expand clear out of the country but you can't operate going 20 miles down the road doing something. I've seen some of them doing it, but they don't make it, it seems like. Or women that go to work in town. It does pay their health, I guess. At one point I finally said to my husband, "You know, why don't you list this place." He said, "You know what we'd have to have? No one would be able to farm it." I said "You know somebody might like to have it." In the meantime in my lifetime I've seen that place go from deer to elk. You cannot tell me you can raise 1,500 elk over 2,000 or 3,000 deer. I mean there were lots of deer out there at one point.

Charmon: And they would just eat your hay, and there goes all your hay for your cows.

Diana: We had the hay yard stack fenced for elk. I mean they gave us the equipment, but when you go up there and there is no grass either. We had 700 animals on us all winter.

Charmon: That don't bring you any money.

Diana: At one point her oldest brother and the hired man could go out and harass them out of the field every night if they wanted to. With the Fish and Game's approval. They said you can kill them. They had the permission, but the guys didn't want to go butcher them in the cold.

Brad: Depredation permits?

Diana: They used the meat, but you have to go out there and do the work. It was hard to do. David Graytak owns it now. He didn't have any reason to keep farming it in the way that it was being farmed.

Charmon: He bought it for recreation, for the hunting.

Diana: And you know, that's fine.

Brad: That brings up another question we have here. In your opinion how has the ranching business and the ranching culture changed? This is a good example of how the land transitioned from being used for one purpose to another. Maybe you could talk about that for a minute, how things have changed.

Diana: I believe even our neighbor, the one family that I know of in that area, is still pretty much in it. They have had to branch out.

Charmon: They've had to be creative.

Diana: Yes, and yet they are just scratching by it seems like. The wives are teaching school and this and that.

Charmon: What the family she is talking about has done is they will do cattle drives. People come and pay to participate in a cattle drive. They do hunting. Some of the family members do the traditional farming, part of it. There was some talk in our family to do that, but I have to say that my dad was a bit stubborn. He just wanted it to be the good old traditional farming.

Brad: I see.

Diana: They have their vacationers in the summer too. That's riding dudes. That takes a certain kind of person.

Charmon: I think that's how a lot of places are surviving.

Brad: By combining more traditional ranching with a new recreation base. So people from the cities or the East Coast, people who don't have access to land, come out and have a western experience. That makes sense. That's really good. I think that answers that question. All of these questions we've talked about are some of the reasons why your children couldn't continue to manage that huge amount of land. Maybe we can look at this last question. I'm interested in what you have to say. Looking back, what did you enjoy most about owning a ranch, and what did you dislike the most (laughter)?

Diana: What I disliked the most was the stress. A lot of people asked me, do you miss the ranch? Yea you miss the ranch, you miss the fact you can go out jump on the 4-wheeler and go to the mountains and look around some nice evening. You just never get over that part of it. A bunch

of baby calves, to see them. One year we had such awful sickness in the calves. That was one of the times that he was bed ridden and couldn't get out. I was doctoring calves and the oldest son was feeding cows. He talked to me about some sick calf and I'd say something about another one dying and he'd say "Mom we have to save more of them." I said, "Yea I know." There was nothing you could do. That's the kind of stress that gets you. If only you could just see them all healthy and running and good.

Brad: It's your livelihood, but you also care about the animals.

Diana: You get so you like just going out and doing things, even if it is work. Even since I've been here I was called up and we go out and pick some berries. My cousin up the road here, she said she used to always be a stay at home mom. She was, but she worked. She did the same that I did. Garden and canning and she raised five kids too, and helped her folks. We were both picking these berries saying "Why in the hell are we doing this for? We don't have to do this anymore (laughter)." But she can tell you. We used to have apples. I made jelly out of apples.

Charmon: She made jelly out of everything.

Diana: If I didn't have enough jelly for the kids for sandwiches I would start making red and yellow and blue.

Charmon: Food coloring.

Brad: Whatever you had. I think we have five minutes left of the recorder. We've gone through the questions I have here in the outline. Is there anything either one of you would like to talk about before we run out of time?

Diana: I guess the basic thing is I still like the ranch and there are times now I still miss the fact you could just go do those things. I've also paid for it. I've had to have knees and hips all replaced. I feel this is attributed to a lot of miles in the saddle. The last twenty years I was basically the main one to ride. So it was tough. We sold in 2000 and then we moved in here. Up until a couple of years ago I pretty much did this yard. We laid this whole yard around this house and it was new. Nobody had done much with the yard.

Brad: You have a beautiful place here.

Diana: She (Charmon) has done it better now. But I sold it to them. I'm done trying to do all this work on it.

Charmon: I think one thing for me growing up farming and ranching is that it definitely taught us a work ethic that I don't think kids today have.

Diana: There is no way they can have one. How can you make a kid in town? Maybe they take out the garbage, but that's nothing. It's not like going and feeding an animal and having to do this or that.

Charmon: Also, we were working right alongside our parents, so you did what your parents said. Now kids' parents are off at the office and nobody is at home telling them that they have to do something. I couldn't wait to get away from that ranch, but I really wish my daughter could have grown up that way.

Diana: The other thing I said, If you are driving a herd of cattle or working with cattle you never hear them saying "When we gonna be done?" The answer is when the last one goes through the cattle chute. If it takes us all day we are going to be here all day. If you are going to dilly dally around it is going to take us longer.

Charmon: There is no sick pay or vacation pay.

Diana: We had some good times and some bad times.

Brad: This has been a great interview, Thank you.